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SECURITY INFORMATION

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

13

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

28 March 1953

SUBJECT: SE-41: PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO CERTAIN  
POSSIBLE UN/US MILITARY COURSES OF ACTION  
WITH RESPECT TO THE KOREAN WAR

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the probable military and political reactions  
of Communist China and the USSR to certain possible UN/US mili-  
tary courses of action with respect to the Korean war.

ESTIMATE

INTRODUCTION: THE OVER-ALL OBJECTIVES OF THE USSR AND COMMUNIST  
CHINA AND THEIR INTERESTS IN KOREA

A. Over-all Soviet and Chinese Communist Objectives

1. The USSR and Communist China are united in their determination  
to weaken and eventually destroy the anti-Communist powers of the

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West in order that Communist strength may be increased and eventual world domination may be assured. At the same time, the USSR and Communist China are joined in their determination to strengthen the bases of Communist power by maintaining and consolidating political control within their respective countries, by expanding their industrial and economic systems, and by augmenting their military establishments. They are also joined in the objective of making secure the borders of present Communist areas of control.

B. The Relation of Korea to Over-all Soviet and Chinese Communist Objectives

2. In order to achieve their over-all objective of weakening and destroying the anti-Communist powers of the West, as well as to consolidate and strengthen their bases of power, the USSR and Communist China have in common the more immediate objectives of eliminating the West from Asia and of driving the West from Korea.

3. Communist courses of action with respect to Korea will also be conditioned by the following interests, listed in estimated order of priority:

- a. Integrity of the Manchurian and Soviet borders;
- b. Security of the Manchurian industrial complex;

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- c. Security of Chinese Communist armed forces in the Korean theater;
- d. Retention of Communist military and political prestige;\*
- e. Survival of a Communist regime in North Korea;
- f. Physical possession of substantially all Korean territory north of the 38th Parallel.

4. Finally, Communist courses of action with respect to Korea will be conditioned by the Communist desire to avoid global war over the Korean issue. Because a general war would risk the destruction of the Communist bases of power, the Communists will attempt to avoid actions in Korea which, in their estimate would precipitate general war, particularly the commitment of Soviet forces against US forces in UN-held territory or adjacent waters. In any event, we believe that if the USSR did commit Soviet forces in such circumstances, the USSR would endeavor to place upon the US the responsibility for recognizing such a commitment as casus belli.

\* The POW issue is an important aspect of Communist interest in retaining military and political prestige. We have estimated in NIE-80, "Communist Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action in Korea Through 1953," 26 March 1953, that "so long as the military stalemate in Korea continues, the Communists are unlikely to make concessions on the POW issue to secure an armistice." However, we have not been able to reach an agreed estimate on the importance of the POW issue in relation to other Communist objectives and interests.

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5. Assuming the above priority of interests and the Communist desire to avoid general war over Korea, the following judgments appear justified:

- a. The Communists would accept greatest risks in countering US/UN moves which, from the Soviet and Chinese Communist view, appeared to endanger the integrity of the Manchurian and Soviet borders.
- b. The Communist would accept almost equally great risks in countering the possible destruction of the Manchurian industrial complex.
- c. The Communists would be willing to risk the security of the Chinese Communist forces to the utmost in attempts to protect the integrity of the Manchurian and Soviet border or the destruction of the Manchurian industrial complex. However, they would probably be willing to make some sacrifice of Chinese Communist military and political prestige if necessary to preserve the integrity of the Manchurian and Soviet borders of the security of their forces. They would probably also endure the loss of a considerable amount of territory in North Korea in order to preserve these forces.

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6. If prior to the onset of any UN/US military course of action, the Communists were presented with a clear choice between making the concessions necessary to reach an armistice, or accepting the risk that UN/US military operations would endanger the integrity of the Manchurian and Soviet borders, destroy the Manchurian industrial complex, or destroy the Chinese Communist armed forces, the Communists would probably seek an armistice. However, we believe that the Communists have considerable doubt of the capability and determination of the UN/US to implement courses of action which could accomplish any or all of these. Therefore, it would be extremely difficult to present them with a clear choice of alternatives before such action was begun. Moreover, once such UN/US action was begun, Communist prestige would become further engaged, thereby greatly increasing the difficulties of making the choice between seeking an armistice or continuing the war.

I. PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO UN/US COURSES OF ACTION WHICH DO NOT INVOLVE EXPANSION OF THE WAR BEYOND KOREA

Course A -- If the UN/US were to continue for the foreseeable future military pressure on the enemy at substantially the present level, while building up ROK forces, with a view to possible limited redeployment of US forces from Korea.

7. Communist China and the USSR would probably not be able initially to interpret the intent of the UN/US build-up for such a

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course of action. The Communists might consider that the UNC were either gradually building up for greatly intensified hostilities, or merely building up ROK strength so that the US could disengage its forces from Korea and end its present maldistribution of power in the Far East.

8. In any event, the Communists would almost certainly continue to build up their military strength in the Korea-Manchuria area for any eventuality,\* and, once it became clear that the US did intend to withdraw forces, would almost certainly seek to exert sufficient military pressure in Korea to preclude any redeployment of US forces. In so doing, the Communists would probably maintain an aggressive, though primarily defensive, military posture and would generally avoid courses of action which they estimated might involve serious risk of general war. The Communists would probably estimate that such a UN/US course of action would not threaten any of their principal interests in Korea, and therefore would almost certainly not feel compelled by such a UN/US course alone to make concessions of the POW issue to secure an armistice.

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\* See NIE-80, "Communist Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action in Korea Through 1953," for a discussion of Communist military capabilities in Korea.

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9. This UN/US course would probably have little or no immediate effect upon Sino-Soviet cooperation in Korea.

Course B -- If the UN/US were to maintain current restrictions on military operations but increase military pressure on the enemy by stepping up ground operations while continuing aggressive air and naval action, with a view to making hostilities more costly to the enemy in the hope that he might agree to an armistice acceptable to the US.

Course C -- If the UN/US were to maintain current restrictions on military operations but continue aggressive air and naval action in Korea while launching a series of coordinated ground operations along the present line followed by a major offensive to establish a line at the waist of Korea, with a view to causing maximum destruction of enemy forces and materiel and achieving a favorable settlement of the Korean war.

10. The Communists would probably not be able initially to interpret UN/US intention with regard to these alternative courses of action. They would probably base their estimate on the apparent size and composition of the UN/US build-up for these intensified military operations and on the degree of mobilization within the US.

11. If, prior to actual initiation of such military operations, the Communists should become convinced that the strength and determination of the UN powers were sufficient to endanger their principal interests

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in the Korean theater, they would probably make the concessions necessary to reach an armistice. We believe it much more likely, however, that the Communists would estimate that the UN/US build-up and determination for these proposed alternatives were not great enough to sustain military operations which would seriously threaten these interests.

12. The Communist reaction, once such military operations had been initiated, would be to counter vigorously. The Chinese Communists would probably make a maximum ground defense effort against these UNC operations, and would probably also launch strong counter-offensive. They would probably make a maximum air defense effort over Communist-held territory and might launch air strikes against UNC amphibious and air-borne operations. During the first phases of the action, the Communists would probably not commit the Communist Air Force in China (CAFIC) to large-scale operations over UN-held territory, and would almost certainly not commit Soviet ground forces in Korea or Soviet air forces over UN-held territory. Although we believe that the Communists would accept substantial losses of men and materiel in countering or containing these UNC operations, we are unable to estimate how great these losses could become before the Communists would feel compelled to seek an armistice.

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13. If UN forces launched a general offensive, as contemplated in Course C, and were successfully pushing north, the Communists would probably estimate that the UN intended to drive Communist forces from Korea, despite any statements to the contrary by the West. If the Communists estimated they would be unable to halt the UN advance without expanding the war, they would probably be willing to sacrifice their lesser interests in Korea in order to reach an armistice. We cannot be certain, however, that they would be willing to make the concessions necessary to gain an armistice and that they would not commit their air force unreservedly over UN-held territory and introduce Soviet ground units to stiffen the Communist defense.

14. If the Communists accepted heavy losses and continued resistance while retreating northward and if UN/US forces then halted and established a defensive line at the waist, the Communists would probably attempt to reconstitute their forces in order to contain further UN advances and in order to prepare for future attempts to drive UN forces from North Korea. We are unable to estimate whether, in these circumstances, the Communists would accept a military and political stalemate along the new line or make the concessions necessary to reach an armistice.

15. The Communists would probably react to these alternative UN/US courses of action by intensifying their peace campaign and seek-

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ing to weaken the determination of the UN nations in Korea.

16. These UN/US courses of action would probably not affect Sino-Soviet cooperation in Korea.

## II. PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO UN/US COURSES OF ACTION WHICH INVOLVE EXPANSION OF THE KOREAN WAR

Course D-- If the UN/US were to extend and intensify military pressures on the enemy by stages, including air attack and naval blockade directly against Manchuria and Communist China, and, if required, increased ground operations in Korea, with a view to making hostilities so costly to the enemy that a favorable settlement of the Korean war might be achieved.

Course E-- If the UN/US were to undertake a coordinated offensive to the waist of Korea, and a naval blockade and air and naval attacks directly against Manchuria and Communist China, with a view to inflicting maximum possible destruction of enemy forces and materiel in Korea consistent with establishing a line at the waist and achieving a favorable settlement of the Korean war.

Course F-- If the UN/US were to undertake a coordinated, large-scale offensive in Korea and a naval blockade and air and naval attacks directly against Manchuria and Communist China, with a view to the defeat and destruction of the bulk of the Communist forces in Korea and settlement of the Korean war on the basis of a unified, non-Communist Korea.

17. During the period of the build-up for these courses of action, the Communists probably would intensify their air defense build-up in Manchuria and China proper, conduct a more aggressive defense in Korea and continue psychological warfare in a coordinated effort to deter an intensification and expansion of the Korean war

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by the US/UN forces. If the Communists became convinced that the UN/US forces had the capability and determination to expand the war and endanger their vital interests, they would probably be willing to compromise some of their lesser interests in order to obtain an armistice agreement.

18. If, as a result of Communist miscalculation of UN/US intentions, or because the Communists were not willing to make the compromises necessary to obtain an armistice, the war were expanded to Manchuria and China proper, the Communists would almost certainly assume, particularly if UN ground forces launched large-scale attacks in Korea, that the UN/US was prepared to accept any risk in order to drive the Communists from Korea and to destroy the military and industrial potential of Communist China. The Communists probably would not assume that UN objectives were limited geographically in Korea or politically in Communist China.

19. We believe that the Communists, while continuing to make maximum resistance -- including greatly increased Soviet participation in the air defense of Manchuria and China proper and CAFIC attacks on UN forces and bases in the Korean and China theaters -- would attempt to negotiate a settlement. We believe

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that so long as they were able to maintain the security of their forces in Korea, inflict serious losses on the UN air forces attacking China and Manchuria, and protect Manchurian industry, the Communists would not be willing to sacrifice any of their important interests in Korea in order to obtain a settlement. Under these circumstances, their unwillingness to compromise their position in Korea would be strengthened if their political and psychological countermeasure appeared to have the effect of significantly reducing UN and/or US determination to sustain an expanded war in the Far East.

20. If, however, in the implementation of any of the above courses of action, the Communists were unable to counter UN/US air operations against Manchuria and if it appeared to the Communists that the Manchurian industrial complex was threatened with destruction, we believe that the Communists, if given the opportunity, would be willing to sacrifice some of their interests in Korea, in order to obtain a cessation of hostilities. We believe, however, that sustained bombardment of Communist China, particularly if limited to transportation facilities and air bases, would not by itself induce the Communists to accept an armistice in Korea on terms that involved a sacrifice of their vital interests in

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Korea or on terms that involved a critical loss of prestige. \*

21. If simultaneously with air attacks on Manchuria and China proper, UN/US forces were advancing in North Korea, the Communists would assume that their vital interests with respect to Korea were endangered, regardless of professed UN/US objectives. Under these circumstances, while seeking to negotiate an armistice that secured continued Communist control over a substantial portion of North Korea, the Communists might commit Soviet air units over UN-held territory and might introduce Soviet ground forces into Korea, leaving to the UN/US the responsibility for recognizing the commitment of Soviet forces as a casus belli.

22. We believe that these UN/US courses of action, even if successful to the point of seriously endangering the vital interests of the Communists in the Korea-Manchuria area, would not in themselves compel the Chinese Communist leadership to alter basically its alignment with the USSR. Although we believe these UN/US courses of action would impose severe strains on the Sino-

\* See SE-37, "Probable Effects on the Soviet Bloc of Certain Courses of Action Directed at the Internal and External Commerce of Communist China", 9 March 1953, for an estimate of the effects on Communist China's military capabilities of an embargo, blockade, and bombardment of Communist China's transportation facilities.

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Soviet relationship, we are unable to estimate the degree to which Sino-Soviet cooperation would be affected in such a situation.

### III. EMPLOYMENT OF ATOMIC WEAPONS

23. If atomic weapons were employed by US/UN forces in any of the above alternative courses of action, we believe that the Communist reaction would be primarily determined by the extent of military damage inflicted. We do not believe that the Communist psychological reaction would in itself be significant. We therefore do not believe that the use of atomic weapons would in itself have a significant effect on Communist willingness to seek an armistice.

### IV. NON-PARTICIPATION OF UN POWERS

24. If UN powers refused to participate in these courses of action, the Communists would be encouraged to resist in the hope of further straining US relations with its western allies and in the hope that US determination to sustain the war alone would falter. The Communists would also feel that the risks of general war would be lessened and therefore they would be less restrained in their military reactions against US operations. If the Communists failed to produce a complete breach in the western alliances and failed to

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defeat or contain unilateral US military efforts, they would probably react to the various alternative courses of action as described above.

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